Brace for Landing

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THE plane had been on autopilot for a while when the first-time co-pilot took over the controls. Hopefully, the passengers did not notice the slight wobble. With sweaty palms, he flew for a few hours, while at the same time, trying to get acquainted with the Pilot, the First Officer and the Chief Stewardess. Everyone in the cockpit was an 'out-sourced' personnel, doing other things for a living when not flying. In fact, they worked on their computers even in the cockpit. Shhh …

Occasionally, the Pilot checked out the passengers and returned remarking that some First Class passengers complained why it took so long to traverse a 'routine' stretch … they had been on the same flight before, and recalled that the on-board screen showed a faster passage. Another passenger remarked that they are not getting value for their money, as the travel agent had a good deal with the airline to promote the flight but did not make sure that the airline could live up to its promises. Luckily, there were also those who enjoyed the ride better than the autopilot mode, perhaps the plane happened to be flying low over a scenic landscape. It is the view, not the flight that counts!

Then the co-pilot received a private call. A family affair needs his urgent attention. Nobody was impressed, especially since they would be landing soon. Reluctantly, the Pilot, still on his computer, took over. "Don't take too long," he demanded, hoping that the co-pilot could be back in time for the messier business of landing. The First Officer graciously offered to help. The Chief Stewardess thought, "Oh, my God ..." Relax, since the Pilot clocked more flying hours, a crash landing was not a concern; besides, the First Officer is an unusually seasoned person.

The co-pilot sheepishly left the cockpit for some private conversation, at the same time feeling both guilt and relief. Perhaps after landing there would be a change of crew. Since everyone is 'out-sourced', who will be on duty next is anybody's guess. As a non-profit carrier, the airline had difficulty securing full-time highly qualified flight crew. The airline had been lucky to get a good advertiser, so at least now it is not bleeding profusely like the good old days when advertising was done in-house. But now the passengers expect a more delicious main course!

So, ladies and gentlemen, please fasten your seat belt, put your seats upright ... (and pray). Thank you for flying with ***XXX*** Airline and hope to see you again soon. ■

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